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WHA/PPC FOR MIKE PUCSETTI  
WHA/BSC FOR DREW BLAKENEY/KENDALL MOSS

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SUBJECT: IOM COUNTRY REP ON IOM'S AND THE GOA'S ANTI-TIP  
EFFORTS

REF: BUENOS AIRES 793

Classified By: Ambassador E. Anthony Wayne for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. On June 29, Ambassador Wayne met with Eugenio Ambrosi, International Organization for Migration (IOM) Country Representative to talk about IOM's efforts to combat trafficking in persons (TIP) and improve the lives of migrant populations in Argentina. (Septel will cover Ambassador's discussion with Foreign Minister on TIP issues.)

Ambrosi thanked the Ambassador for USG funding of its programs in Argentina, and noted that this has helped raise awareness of the problem. He expressed optimism that anti-TIP legislation would be passed (paras 3-4) despite ongoing debate in the Congress over the issue of consent, and speculated that the bill that prevails will depend on whether President Nestor Kirchner or his wife, Senator Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner will run for the Presidency in October.

If the latter, Ambrosi predicted that the House version would prevail. Ambrosi identified official complicity at provincial and local levels and poor interagency coordination at all levels as impediments to effectively combating the problem (paras 5-6).

¶2. (C) Summary Continued. Ambrosi also provided an assessment of the Ministry of Labor's campaign to prevent child labor (para 7) and informed the Ambassador of IOM programs to help Bolivian sweatshop labor victims, regularize the status of undocumented workers, and provide small loans to migrant workers living in urban slums (paras 8-11). Ambrosi also informed the Ambassador of recent death threats IOM staff received in the Tri-Border Area of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay (para 12). Finally, Ambrosi requested Embassy assistance in: 1) obtaining GOA approval for government airtime on private TV channels for its TV and radio campaign; 2) persuading MTV-Argentina to air an IOM-produced music video on the issue; and 3) organize a roundtable with donor countries and multilateral banks to make a pitch for funding (paras 13-15). The Ambassador agreed to assist IOM in these efforts and informed Ambrosi that the Embassy had recommended additional Department funding of IOM programs in Argentina during G/TIP's call for proposals. (Comment: IOM has proven to have the institutional capacity to effectively tackle the trafficking problem in Argentina. Post recommends that their bilateral and regional proposals be given favorable

consideration.) End Summary.

#### Electoral Politics Will Determine Fate of Anti-TIP bill

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¶3. (C) On June 29, Ambassador Wayne met with IOM Country Representative Eugenio Ambrosi to discuss IOM's programs in Argentina. The Ambassador began by praising IOM's efforts to fight human trafficking in Argentina. Ambrosi thanked the Ambassador for USG funding of its programs in Argentina, and noted that with this funding, IOM has helped raise awareness of the problem and put it on the public agenda in Argentina and the region. The Ambassador observed that there has been a great deal of momentum in the Congress to pass anti-TIP legislation and asked for Ambrosi's assessment of the situation. Ambrosi noted that civil society is now pressing the GOA to pass legislation criminalizing human trafficking, and the GOA has no other alternative but to pass legislation given that it is an electoral year and it does not want to leave the issue unaddressed.

¶4. (C) Ambrosi stated that currently there are competing visions in the Congress. The debate not only centers around the issue of considering adult victims' consent as relevant when determining whether or not trafficking has occurred, but also over which Ministry or Ministries will be charged with implementing the legislation. Interior Minister Fernandez represents one side of the debate, and Alicia Kirchner, Minister of Social Development and President Kirchner's sister represents the other. Ambrosi further explained that Minister Fernandez not only wants the MOI to have control over enforcing the law, but also control over providing victim's assistance. Minister Kirchner and Deputy Stella Maris Cordoba prefer to delegate the responsibility of

providing victims assistance to the Ministry of Social Development. The version that prevails will ultimately depend on who runs for President, Ambrosi speculated. If Senator and First Lady Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner runs, then the MOI's position will weaken and the Deputies version will likely win. If it's President Kirchner, it will likely be the Senate version that will prevail, Ambrosi stated. (Note: Since this meeting, the Casa Rosada has announced that the First Lady will be the one to seek the Presidency in the October elections. End Note.)

#### The Twin Problems of Official Complicity and Poor Interagency Coordination

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¶5. (C) Electoral politics may also be the reason why Minister Fernandez is reluctant to back a bill that deems adult victims' consent as irrelevant, Ambrosi continued. Recounting an earlier conversation he had with Fernandez, Ambrosi claimed that Fernandez told him that if the anti-TIP law applied to adult victims as well, the GOA would have to go after half of all provincial governors. Ambrosi acknowledged that while high-level officials may not be directly involved in trafficking activities, they are likely aware of the problem and are currently doing little to stop it. Passing a law that provides a loophole for traffickers of adult victims does not make sense, Ambrosi argued, adding that the victim in the emblematic Marita Veron case was 23 years-old when she was kidnapped and trafficked.

¶6. (C) Regardless of which bill passes, how the law is implemented is what really matters, Ambrosi continued. Argentine interagency coordination leaves much to be desired, he opined, adding that no one wants to work with anyone, not even within the same ministry. IOM works with 15 government agencies, including the Prosecutor General, as well as the Ministries of Interior, Foreign Affairs, Labor, Justice, and Social Development. Although these agencies work on different aspects of the problem, when it comes to providing victims assistance, they all turn to IOM since it alone has funds and resources to assist victims. Ambrosi stated that IOM helped 147 victims last year, and in every case an agency

has complained to IOM, not over the assistance itself, but over why one agency was informed before another. He explained that IOM does not always have the luxury to consult with everyone as some cases are security sensitive and require urgent action, often departing Argentina within 48 hours.

#### Sweatshop and Child Labor in Argentina

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17. (C) Noting press reports identifying Argentine children's clothing brand Cheeky as using sweatshop labor, the Ambassador observed that the Ministry of Labor (MOL) recently launched a campaign to eradicate child labor. Ambrosi noted that the MOL has focused on this issue for a number of years, with an emphasis on public awareness of the problem. The campaign features a hotline where citizens can report child labor violations, but Ambrosi noted that he personally has called the number several times with no answer.

18. (C) The Ambassador then asked whether forced labor is a major problem in Argentina. Ambrosi recalled the March 2006 sweatshop fire in Buenos Aires that killed six Bolivians, two of them women, and the rest children. He explained that 90% of Bolivians immigrate to Argentina with their families, and that many are promised work in exchange for wages, lodging and meals for their family. In reality, they work and live in the sweatshop often under lock and key, and receive only one meal a day to be shared among the whole family. When Poloff asked about GOA and societal attitudes that suggest Bolivians are "naturally submissive" and have often returned to the very sweatshops they were previously rescued from preferring any job to none at all, Ambrosi rejected the argument outright. He asserted that when IOM has interviewed Bolivian victims if they would prefer to work under

slave-like conditions or start their own business, they all state that they would prefer to work on their own. To address this, IOM has helped to establish two cooperatives for Bolivian trafficking victims. Each cooperative assists 22 Bolivians, and they are able to make more money by skipping several levels of the sub-contracting production chain, Ambrosi noted.

19. (C) The Ambassador then asked whether Argentina's human trafficking problem was increasing. Ambrosi stated that the numbers are going up partly due to increased awareness and partly because global trends indicate an overall increase in human trafficking. He stated that although trafficking victims for the purposes of sexual exploitation far outnumber the victims of labor exploitation, victims who have received IOM assistance are more evenly split between sexual (55%) and labor exploitation (45%). Although, historically, Bolivians have been exploited in the textile industry, IOM has received an increasing number of cases of Bolivians who are being exploited in the agriculture sector, Ambrosi explained.

#### IOM Programs in Argentine villas

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10. (C) Ambrosi also informed the Ambassador of IOM's microcredit program in villas de miseria (poor slums) with high migrant populations, such as Villa 31 near the Retiro train station, where the majority of the population are Paraguayan and Bolivian cartoneros, sorting through garbage to recycle cardboard, glass, and plastic. IOM provides these workers with small loans on the condition that their children go to school. The children are then automatically enrolled in Spanish-Argentine cell phone company Movistar's "Pro-Nio" program where they are given school supplies and medical assistance. The program benefits 46 migrant workers and 300 children. IOM is now expanding the program with IDB funds, Ambrosi explained. IOM has also provided small loans to help undocumented workers obtain their immigration papers through the GOA's "Patria Grande" program aimed at regularizing the status of undocumented immigrants. Ambrosi stated that so far loan repayment rates for this program is

100%.

¶11. (C) Ambrosi noted, however, that one area IOM does not have much information on is how much trafficking is going on in the villas. There is a great deal of sexual violence against women and children in the villas, he stated, and sexual exploitation is highly likely. He stated that he has heard of several cases where women in the villas are having children for the sole purpose of selling them for illegal adoption. IOM would like to investigate the issue a bit further, he asserted, but pointed out that there are serious security concerns to consider first. The Ambassador then asked whether the villa problem was increasing or decreasing especially given Argentina's economic recovery. Ambrosi replied that the villas are increasing, but that it is difficult to determine whether this indicates an overall increase in poverty or if it reflects migration patterns of the poor from the interior of the country to the capital city.

#### TBA Security incident

¶12. (C) Ambrosi also informed the Ambassador of death threats IOM staff received via phone and SMS messages in the tri-border area (TBA) of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay in late May. He explained that the threats were made in Ciudad del Este, Paraguay and Foz de Iguazu, Brazil immediately after IOM launched an information campaign specifically designed to raise youth awareness of the problem in the TBA. (Note: In early June, IOM held a joint press conference with INADI Director Maria Jose Lubertino to denounce the threats. End Note.) He stated that 65-70% of the human trafficking problem in the Brazil/Southern Cone region occurs in the TBA, and most of the problem was trafficking in minors, for labor and commercial sex purposes as well as illegal adoptions. According to Ambrosi, when IOM staff reported the threats to the Police chief in Brazil, the police chief told IOM that he could not accept the complaint because the staffer was Paraguayan. When the IOM staffer went to the Police Chief in Paraguay to report the incidents, the staffer claims to have recognized individuals known to be involved in trafficking coming out of the Police Chief's office while the staffer was filing the complaint. Finally, Ambrosi stated that when he and IOM staff asked the cell phone company in Paraguay to trace the SMS messages, company representatives claimed that the only SMS messages they could not trace for that day were the ones in question. Due to the incident, IOM obtained Department permission to postpone implementation of the program until August. Department funds for the program ends in September, Ambrosi added.

#### IOM requests assistance with Media Campaign and Donor Roundtable

¶13. (C) Ambrosi also told the Ambassador of IOM's current TV and radio campaign to increase public awareness of human trafficking and highlight a hotline managed by the National Institute Against Discrimination (INADI). The high quality campaign includes several 30-second public service spots explaining different aspects of human trafficking, and a song and video explaining the trafficking process and how to obtain help featuring popular, Uruguayan singer/actress Natalia Oreiro. For now, the campaign is being aired on local channels, and the city of Buenos Aires has posted IOM billboards throughout the city and airs the campaign on closed circuit television in the subway system. As a result of the campaign, Ambrosi stated that INADI received 700 calls in the last month, with a significant number of calls requesting more information about the problem and how to verify job offers that sound too good to be true. (Note: Although the campaign encourages victims and their families to call the hotline for assistance, sources have told us that the hotline is only staffed by one person per shift and also takes general calls related to discrimination complaints. End Note.)

¶14. (C) Ambrosi stated that he hopes to distribute the message more broadly. IOM, however, has unsuccessfully tried to obtain Media Secretary Enrique Albistur's approval to use GOA airtime on private TV channels to feature the campaign despite efforts by Human Rights Secretary Duhalde to weigh in with Albistur on IOM's behalf. Ambrosi told the Ambassador that Albistur owns an advertising firm that produces all of the GOA's social campaigns. As the IOM campaign was not produced by Albistur's production company, Ambrosi stated that he suspects this may be the reason why Albistur has not agreed to meet with him. He asked the Ambassador to raise the issue with Interior Minister Fernandez who could, in turn, persuade Albistur. The Ambassador agreed to raise the issue with Fernandez. Ambrosi also noted that he is meeting with cable companies, including MTV, to try and get airtime with the cable channels. He asked whether the Ambassador could ask MTV to support IOM's request. The Ambassador agreed to look at how best to do this and suggested that IOM also reach out to local music television channels as well.

¶15. (C) As Department funding for IOM programs in Argentina come to an end, Ambrosi asked the Ambassador for support in organizing a roundtable with other donor countries and multilateral banks where IOM could make a pitch for funding. He noted that the IDB helped to organize a similar roundtable in Paraguay which "worked well". The Ambassador noted that the EU has funded anti-TIP programs in the past, but has concentrated mainly on curbing the problem in Eastern Europe. Ambrosi stated that the EU, and other countries such as Spain and Italy, may have an interest in fighting the problem, especially since they are destination countries for many trafficking victims in the Southern Cone. For example, 25% of Paraguayan victims transit Argentina en route to Spain, he explained. The Ambassador offered Embassy assistance in organizing such an event in the coming months. He and Poloff also informed Ambrosi that the Embassy had recommended additional Department funding of IOM programs in Argentina during G/TIP's call for proposals (reftel) but that funding decisions would be made in Washington. (Comment: IOM has proven to have the institutional capacity to effectively tackle the problem in Argentina. Post recommends that their bilateral and regional proposals be given favorable consideration.)

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